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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: DECEMBER POLITICAL UPDATE

CLASSIFIED BY CHARGE TIM ANDREWS. REASONS 1.5 (B) and (D).

1. (U) This periodic update for political events in Nigeria includes items of interest from recent weeks. Topics covered in this edition include:

-- INEC: 30 Political Associations for Registration
-- Cabinet Shake-Up
-- Rimi and Others Sue the PDP

OPENING THE POLITICAL SPACE: 30 NEW POLITICAL PARTIES

2. (U) Pursuant to the Supreme Court decision that previous guidelines for registering political parties were unconstitutional and too stringent, the Independent National Election Commission (INEC) begrudgingly registered 24 new parties in December. The new parties are:

National Conscience Party (NCP),
People's Redemption Party (PRP),
Movement for Democracy and Justice (MDJ),
National Reformation Party (NRP),
All Peoples Liberation Party (APLP),
Better Nigeria Progressive Party (BNPP),
Community Party of Nigeria (CPN),
Democratic Alternative (DA),
Justice Party (JP),
Liberal Democratic Party of Nigeria (LDPN),
Masses Movement of Nigeria (MMN),
National Action Council (NAC),
National Mass Movement of Nigeria (NMMN),
New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP),
New Democrats (ND),
Nigeria Advance Party (NAP),
Nigerian Peoples Congress (NPC),
Party for Social Democracy (PSD),
Peoples Mandate Party (PMP),
Peoples Salvation Party (PSP),
Progressive Action Congress (PAC),
Action Renaissance Party (ARP),
United Democratic Party (UDP), and
Green Party of Nigeria (GPN).

3. (SBU) Many of these parties are insignificant and barely exist outside the imagination of their founders. However, some are headed by respected politicians such as former Kaduna Governor Balarabe Musa (PRP), former Police Inspector M. D. Yusufu (MDJ), human rights firebrand Gani Fawahenmi (NCP), and perennial presidential contestant Tunji Braithwaite (NAP). Well-known human rights attorney Olisa Agbakoba, a long-shot presidential candidate in the PDP, jumped to the Green Party when it was allowed to register. None of these parties have a chance of capturing the Presidency, and few have any chance of winning many seats in State Assemblies, to say nothing of the National Assembly.

4. (C) However, the inclusion of these parties represents an opening of the political space. For many Nigerians the new parties symbolize a possible alternative to the monetized politics of the major parties. Now less-affluent but more ideologically oriented politicians can head parties and use these parties as their platforms to address the public. Some of these players and their parties have committed pockets of followers, albeit relatively small, in key areas. They might affect numerous local government races and perhaps have limited impact in some state level races. Most of these parties are Southern-based.

The five to seven best-organized new parties are discussing an electoral alliance under the rubric of the Coalition of Nigerian Political Parties (CNPP).

15. (C) The danger always exists that proliferation of parties will confuse the electorate or encourage ethnic or regional politics. This was the rationale used in the recent past to thwart registration of these parties. However, most Nigerians welcomed the registration of the parties. They see it as a vehicle to improve grassroots participation. The advent of these parties should engender a greater sense of freedom of association and foster the perception that politics need not be the exclusive reserve of the wealthy. Additionally, pressure from the new parties might help make INEC more transparent in its electoral preparations.

16. (C) Cynical observers claim registration of the new parties was not based on principle but expediency. They contend the Presidency and PDP wanted to increase the number of parties to fragment and dilute the opposition. This argument has some merit and cannot be completely ignored. Conventional wisdom within the PDP is that the increase in parties favors them. However, the PDP gaining advantage from this is not entirely certain. Much will depend on the candidates these parties may present and how they match up with PDP candidates as well as the candidates from the other previously registered parties, particularly the main opposition party, the ANPP.

CABINET SHAKE-UP

17. (C) President Obasanjo and the Federal Executive Council (FEC) named new ministers to replace those who resigned to participate in the upcoming elections. Controversial Minister of Works and Housing Chief Tony Anenih resigned to concentrate on his responsibilities as Deputy National Coordinator of the Obasanjo/Atiku reelection campaign. Minister of State Garba Madaki replaces Anenih at the helm of Works and Housing. Anenih's removal was one of the conditions Vice President Atiku and former Head of State Babangida had given to Obasanjo for supporting his reelection. While intervening events make Babangida's support unlikely, Anenih's resignation probably has made Atiku more comfortable about remaining on the Obasanjo ticket. Clearly there was no love lost between Atiku and Anenih. That Anenih now serves directly under Atiku, the de facto campaign manager, compounds the former minister's diminution.

18. (C) Internal Affairs Minister Sunday Afolabi also quit to join the reelection campaign. Minister of State Mohammed Shata replaced him. (Afolabi is from the Southwest and is expected to work on assuring Obasanjo's base among the Yorubas.) Minister of Power and Steel Dr. Segun Agagu resigned to run for governor in Ondo State. His replacement is a fellow Yoruba, Olu Agunloye. Minister of Commerce Alhaji Mustapha Bello will contest the gubernatorial election in Niger State. Bellow was replaced by Minister of State for Water Resources, Precious Ngele. Current Niger State Governor Kure, although in the PDP, is a Babangida acolyte. There was speculation that the contest between Kure and Bello could turn into a proxy war for Babangida and Obasanjo. However, true to the policy of supporting incumbent PDP governors, public statements from the Presidency have been supportive of Kure and silent about Bello. Meanwhile, Minister of Finance Adamu Ciroma retains his portfolio despite his nominal duties as the Obasanjo/Atiku campaign national coordinator.

RIMI SUES THE PDP

19. (U) Former Kano State Governor and long-shot PDP presidential aspirant Abubakar Rimi has lodged two legal complaints against his party. Joined by fellow long-shot candidate Barnabas Gemade, Rimi complains that the decision to zone the presidency to the South contravened the party constitution. PDP Chairman Audu Ogbeh, however, might have taken some of the wind from this complaint by explaining that the decision to zone

the presidency to the three Southern political zones was not final until approved by the party's National Executive Committee. (Both Rimi and Gemade would be eliminated if the presidency were zoned to the South. Likewise, VP Atiku would be foreclosed as well. Obasanjo and his most potent primary opposition, Alex Ekwueme are both Southerners.)

10. (C) Rimi's suit contesting the allocation of voting delegates to the national convention is perhaps even more important. This suit seeks to overturn a 2001 amendment to the PDP constitution. The amendment makes most classes of presidential appointees (presidential advisors, ambassadors, heads of parastatals, etc.) voting delegates at the national convention that will select the party's presidential candidate. Given the swollen number of advisors and others appointees, this amendment provides Obasanjo the very significant lead in recapturing the nomination. (Comment: While motivated by selfish reasons, Rimi's suits, if successful, would inject greater openness into the PDP's presidential selection process. Rimi's suits are not logically consistent. On one hand, he grouses that zoning contravenes the party constitution. In the second suit, he asserts that the party constitution is wrong. The possibility of winning either argument is uncertain but chances are the courts will not let Rimi have it both ways. End Comment.)

11. (U) The party constitution also gives similar favor to state governors. Due to this provision and other alleged irregularities, a group of non-incumbent gubernatorial contestants in the PDP successfully won a temporary injunction in early December stopping the party's gubernatorial primaries. However, the Chief Justice of the Federal High Court in Abuja reportedly quashed the injunction on December 20, giving the PDP a green light to conduct the gubernatorial caucuses.
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